554 Briault, an accurate observer of the Fang states that the death of
578 a chief, or an old man, or a notable person, is suspect and demands a much more "minute" enquiry than in the case of men of the common people." "Whoever has privileges is envied, whoever exerts authority makes malcontents; many chiefs have died unexpectedly; many who were envied have not made old bones; this must be fairly common since it is confirmed by proverbs (2)...."

2. M. Briault, Sur les pistes de l'A.E.F. [On the Trails of French Equatorial Africa], 1948, pp. 37-38, 42-43.

One might say that "intentional death" threatens (threatened rather, for colonial affairs and peace have allowed some to grow rich and to be protected) those who in their own interest disregard the fundamental solidarity and leveling tendency.

● 631 [140] By this play of forces, more or less antagonistic and varying according to circumstances, Fang society is protected from any excessive concentration of power. This explains why, in spite of its conquering military nature, it has never allowed even a rudimentary feudal system to appear. Strictly controlled, power was organized only at the level of small units — a village or a group of villages, relatives or neighbors. It has only exceptionally (and precariously) gone beyond the frontiers of these groupings, and as the "associations" have barely been able to remedy this deficiency, Fang society shows an absolute lack of centralization, which was a contributing factor in its rapid deterioration during the colonial period.

692 In a social system which leaves plenty of room for opposing relationships, cases of judicial action and conciliation play an important part. The Fang have not only established a classification of offenses — nté, simple disagreement; étôm, serious dis-
[673] pute that might result in war; and nsêm, ritual infraction —
[681] and a gradation of punishments going up to holding a hostage (étéa), but have also conceived a judicial organization with

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had not done so, the clan chose its chief, and the neighboring populations each sent him a spear in token of recognition.

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The power of the Fong chief is on an even more personal level. The chief conveys his commands by means of an enormous drum; his pipe is preserved like a relic; his musicians play special instruments, among them the nkeñ (percussion double bell), quite rare in that region but a classical instrument in the western Cameroons with the Bamiléké or Bamoum /Mum/. The chief's installation is marked by the tradition of the spears and the donning of a headpiece of parrot plumes. (J. B.)

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Any more extensive authority was founded on personal prestige, which always aroused resentment. Authority was never conferred except temporarily, and it was quite often withdrawn from the holder before term.

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French, German, and Spanish administrations have attempted to set up a hierarchical system of authority that it has never been possible really to impose upon the country. The three administrations all made the initial mistake of trying to establish this authority on a territorial basis, which is completely—or nearly—foreign to these nomadic people. Only village chiefship had some resemblance to a customary institution, provided that the choice of chief fell upon a ntôl môt, a genuine senior, and that his brothers accepted his authority. Canton and higher chiefdoms had no cohesion except insofar as the incumbent had authority or administrative support. At the beginning of the colonial period, however, these functions were very often entrusted to genuine bejôô bôt, /62/ well-known war chiefs, high initiates of societies like the ngil, or celebrated magicians. Later on, it became more difficult to find, even among opposition ranks, chiefs possessed of real authority. After 1945 there was an attempt in the Cameroons to reorganize the system of authority on a clan basis (the Bourdier-Granier reform), then on village lines (the Christol system), finally ending up with a municipal type of system.

631 Given Pahouin interest in a political system based on election, which
634 pretty well corresponds both with their individualism and with their
181 mistrust of individuals, it may be that such a system has some chance of success if it is allowed to become Pahounized.

5. Associations

575 Traditional associations were undoubtedly less developed among the Pahouin than among other African societies with more closely knit or more stable hierarchical structures. The social groups at the core of clans or villages arose and decayed in accordance with migrations and "swarmings-off." They showed a kinship rather than an associational character.

Nevertheless, there existed within kinship as well as outside it associations not based on descent, voluntary and not de facto /discretionary?/. These were often characterized by initiations and had a magical or religious basis, with varying purposes.

The minsamba, "societies," were temporary, organized for a military operation (ôban, mvéle) or for a trade journey to the coast or to the "trading-posts" of the Ogooué. The men who took part often came from different villages or even from different clans bound by an alliance (élat). They swore an oath of loyalty and mutual assistance, involving a ritual sacrifice followed by a communion
782 meal; for a war enterprise, there might be a human victim, especially if it were a matter of avenging the death, kum mbim, of a monyañ (brother) and if there were a prisoner of war available to sacrifice. The association was dissolved once its end had been accomplished, but a bond persisted between its members.

204 Similar temporary associations could be formed for large elephant
141 hunts; they were moreover often confused with the nsamba dulu or nsamba ayak (traveling society, trade society) afterward organized for the sale of the ivory.

575 The most important permanent associations were those among the
783 initiates of different rites. But what was most often involved in these was a kind of relationship by way of a rite, which was not the rite's real purpose, or was so only adventitiously. When, for instance, all the inhabitants of a village took part in the ésye purification rite, a strengthening of the fraternal ties among them certainly ensued, but the prime purpose was purification (1). /63/

535 and flutes; chorus sung by the dancers; white dresses, a uniform headkerchief and foulard sash; the musical themes are those belonging to village, association, and clan; it is danced at civil or religious festivals, mebɔ̂k, mevak, and at bisulan (ayoñ meetings), etc.; the words are sometimes satirical.

535 anyeñ, a men's or (more rarely) a women's dance, similar to the above, perhaps inspired by it, but more lively. The words are often obscene, the gestures scatological (in the men's version); probably of ritual origin; one of the few male dances surviving today.

akɔ̂ma mba, danced by one or two young women; a chorus of women, with the large vertical drum, mbaé; raffia fiber skirt and bare torsos; an ancient ritual (marriage?) dance; it is looked at askance by the missions and is becoming rare.

asiko, a modern mixed dance, quite erotic; no costumes; percussion instruments and rattles; a mixed chorus; it is forbidden by the missionaries.

[171] In towns, European or American dances are current under the generic name "tango," although the rhythm, when they are not danced to a phonograph, is rather that of a /West Indian/ beguine, often fugual.

536 The theatre, unknown in the past, is beginning to develop, partly under the influence of youth organizations introduced from outside. At bisulan, short farces are often put on, like morality plays, or satirical sketches related to our cabaret revues, in which there is no hesitation in scoffing at the authorities.

Chapter 7

The Process of Change

1. Local Government Organs

631 177 The disintegration characteristic of Pahouin clans makes it difficult to establish a coherent organization. The conflict between the system of personal rights and that of territorial rights is clear-cut:

631 177 insofar as he accepts an authority higher than that of the head of the family a Pahouin is dependent upon the head of his ayoñ, who may live several hundred kilometers away. This authority had a sacred character and was based on laws of consanguinity. In addition, there were, even before the coming of the Europeans, other influences at work, tending to group people no longer on a basis of kinship but on that of local relations. Among the Fong of the Cameroons, for instance, as early as 1880, a chief had brought together under his control families that belonged to different clans and involved them in expeditions against Maka villages. From among the conquered he chose some young children for himself, brought them up, and saw them settled, creating thus, outside his consanguineal family, and even outside his tribe, a group of people devoted to his person.

Therefore, upon the power of the clan there was superposed an authority that assumed an interclan and even intertribal character. Among the Beti peoples of the Yaoundé region nearly the same system was in effect. The clans had more coherence than among the Fang or the Boulou. But the chief controlled, in addition to his own mvog, conquered families, beloa or beloa bitoa, to whom he assigned land along the margins of his domain.

The transition from a system of authority based on the law of consanguinity to a territorial one is already apparent.

In the face of Pahouin lack of political order, which nullified all attempts at organization, Europeans unconsciously tried to reinforce the trend toward a territorial system of authority.

[67] Since the period of the great invasions, in fact, the jus soli has been authenticated as a basis of authority, while /the application of/ the jus sanguinis involves a thousand difficulties and makes it almost impossible to govern.

By a curious paradox, nevertheless, the presence of Europeans favored legal principles opposed to those they might have desired. The tribal wars brought about a regrouping around the victor and enabled him to carve out a domain /seigneurie/. The chaotic Pahouin migrations strained clan ties: what family relationships can survive a lengthy separation, /129/ particularly when journeys are rare and dangerous? These factors would have brought about the creation of territorial entities. Peace, on the other hand, which allowed the resumption of relations, improved mobility, and per-

[62] mitted individual freedom, favored a return to the law of consanguinity; the individual person, whether young man or head of a

177 family, had a profound sense of being a member of a community
621 scattered over several thousand square kilometers, whereas he did not
631 feel strongly bound to his neighbor who belonged to another ayoñ.

648 The German colonial administration divided the country up into
631 large chiefdoms as a solution to this difficult problem, a possible solution if the country had not been an ethnic as well as a clan maze. If the territory of the large tribes—Boulou, Bané, Ewondo, etc. — had been a little more homogeneous, it would have been conceivable to entrust each region to a chief, at a higher level than that of clan allotments. But the confusion of peoples and their wide dispersion made any solution precarious. Authority was not always accepted without demur, and among populations with anarchistic tendencies it is not easy to build up a ruling class /aristocratie/ sufficiently sure of itself not to perpetrate abuses. There was no time for the system of large appanages to take root. Chiefs of cantons and village chiefs both rule over more limited but clear-cut territories; as representatives of the principle of jus soli their influence view with that of the clan movements embodying the jus sanguinis.

631 In Gabon, Pahouin leaders had the idea of mingling the two
668 tendencies. Starting with the assumption that the villages were too small, they sanctioned a regrouping which would have allowed both stronger chiefdoms and a beginning of reassembling of clans.

The regrouping of the meyoñ does not seem to have been planned as a whole, nor does it seem that a territorial base had been thought of for each clan, which would have resolved, for the time being at least, the conflict between the law of things /droit réel/ and the law of persons /droit personnel/. Only a partial solution was considered: the establishment of large, single-clan villages (1). In

1. J. Aubame, Renaissance gabonaise /Renaissance in Gabon/, Brazzaville, 1947 (no. 171); Balandier and Pauvert (no 177).

fact, and in spite of the endless difficulties connected with the transfer of population, the regrouping was able to give to the chiefdom a new prestige, by confirming its character as a territorial power on the one hand, and by binding it, on the other hand, to the meyoñ traditions. In the present state of affairs, cantons and even villages

631 include representatives of all the clans. Who then could exercise
668 authority over such a motley population, if they were to follow purely traditional rules? Various methods are used for selecting chiefs. In one place people adhere to investing the legitimate heir of the lineage of the village founder. Elsewhere, a representative of the largest ayoñ is sought. Quite often, particularly in the Cameroons, the choice of chief by /130/ election is believed to allow the population to express their views, whatever the motives of selection may be. Will the village regrouping movement permit the establishment of a new, better-adapted system? A blaze of enthusiasm has gripped the Fang people, convinced that the new system will make it possible to solve all problems as by a magical formula, without sacrificing either traditional forms or individual anarchy.

In the Cameroons a few years ago the movement to regroup the meyoñ appeared just as likely to bring an end to all difficulties. More bound up with traditional institutions, the meyoñ organization movement set out simply to give some order to the intellectual and moral /behavioral?—Tr./ life of groups by codifying customs, taking note of traditions, and creating a collective awareness, a common clan sentiment, through periodic meetings, dances, and songs. In contrast to the movement in Gabon, the bisulan movement hardly touches upon the concrete, the economic field.

It is worth emphasizing that this movement did not question the administrative division into regions and subdivisions. The bisulan do not in fact seem to have voiced any criticism of this distinction, and the population of Dja-and-Lobo even expressed a lively wish to see Sangmélima raised to regional status and separated administratively from the N'Tem region.

In fact, though local organization at the lowest levels may not have found its bearings, at a higher level it seems to have become thoroughly incorporated in the country. When they reached Pahouin
646 country, the European powers—France, Germany, Spain—set up a
631 network of resident posts for the representatives of authority. In this country without crystallizing centers, the main town of a subdivision has become a town with a town's multiple functions, administrative, judicial, cultural (missions and schools), economic (road station,
[1184] trade). A study of the journeys made by the rural population of the southern Cameroons shows clearly that these towns are no longer artificial centers but genuine points of attraction. The capital of

their subdivision is the goal of 37 percent of travelers. The motives indicated vary greatly: people go there for reasons connected with their jobs (1.3%), for medical care (2%), to attend to matrimonial affairs (9.5%), to visit relatives (10.5%), merely for their own pleasure (23%), to attend to business connected with the public services (civil status /état civil/, law, various public departments, in 45% of the cases). There is no need to underline the importance of contacts with the administration. So in the Cameroons it has been thought necessary to decentralize the administrative machinery further and to place it within reach of the people. The establishment of new subdivisions within the Yaoundé region and of administrative posts in Boulou country demonstrate this attitude. All this takes place as if the Pahouin, in vague resentment /131/ against the inadequacies of their traditional organization, were trying to replace them with new and foreign institutions.

In order to prevent the population from totally committing its fate into the hands of the European organization and thereafter refusing to make any personal effort at improving their condition, the French administration has attempted, at the same time as it distributed authority throughout the country, to remove concentration at the center. Though it was beneficial to multiply the agents of the central power in contact with the population, it was even more necessary to give the people or their representatives the opportunity to manage public services and to organize the collective life.

Civil law was, therefore, largely decentralized. In addition to the first- and second-degree courts at which subdivision or regional heads /chefs de... —the implication here is of French colonial officials. —Tr./ made decisions based on custom, assisted by African assessors, there were created a great many "customary" courts whose judges were not officials. In the majority of cases, chiefs were thus appointed as presidents of customary courts, with prominent men and secretaries to help them. The number of cases dealt with allows us to believe that the reform has been beneficial. Though the nature of the suits has no bearing on the local government organization, it should, nevertheless, be mentioned for the light it throws on the points of friction that exist between individuals.

In the Cameroons the distribution was as follows: divorces, 38 percent; liberation of widows, 6 percent; adultery, 9 percent; real property rights, 17 percent. These represent the principal disputes; the probable maladjustment of matrimonial institutions provides the main portion.

Next, the establishment of urban and rural municipal councils permits financial decentralization. Towns under the term "urban communes," cantons, and sometimes whole subdivisions under the term "rural communes," received a legal character, with a domain to manage and a budget to fix. Elected councilors under an appointed mayor had to study plans for road works, to set up construction or maintenance programs, inquire into taxes? /taxes/ and assessments /impôts/, and have an eye to a sound financial position.

In towns this was nothing new, but its extension to wide rural areas was an experiment. Boulou or Beti country, where there was no risk of these new methods giving offense to a strong traditional /social/ structure, was the ideal place for trying out a new /kind of/ organization.

Throughout the elections arranged to fill the posts of councilor, we can see crystallizing the most striking traits of the new élite, the characteristics of the aristocracy or oligarchy that will get itself into power.

Pessimists had expressed fear that such elections, based on almost universal suffrage, would overthrow the classical social values and impair the prestige of the present acting élite.

This point of view disregarded the fact that in a country practically without stratification, no one can keep authority without the support of public opinion. /132/ Granting the vote to vassals in a feudal society may unsettle the power of the nobility. It is quite otherwise here, where chiefs of village or canton are most commonly chosen by election.

The older men have preserved a privileged position vis-à-vis the younger generation. A comparison of the age pyramid of councilors with that of the adult male population as a whole readily shows this: (table on following page).

The younger generation is poorly represented. Mature men of thirty to forty are represented in proportion to their ratio in the total population; but men of forty to fifty or of the older age group are heavily represented. Electoral influence has not been seized by the younger men.

Neither does it appear that the poorer class, more numerous than the rich, has benefited from the ballot so as to eliminate the latter. From the point of view of the possession of a certain amount of wealth, we can assert that municipal councilors are much better off than the common people.